

First Call / 2-1-1 hereby submits its Reply Comments to Public Notice DA 07-2017, released May 7, 2007. The Public Notice requested comments on the status of implementation of the 211 and 511 Dialing Codes. Further, the Public Notice requested comments on actions the Commission should take if these Dialing Codes are not widely used. First Call / 2-1-1 is limiting its comments to the status of First Call / 2-1-1, Grand Rapids, MN as a call center hub in the Minnesota system.

First Call / 2-1-1 has been a part of Minnesota 2-1-1 since its initial deployment. First Call / 2-1-1 in Grand Rapids, MN employs 5 people [and is also supported by 30 volunteers], and since Minnesota 2-1-1 was launched in July of 2001, has provided 2-1-1 service to 7 counties in the state of Minnesota reaching a population of 158,719. The statewide database of service providers used for making referrals has listings for more than 13,000 agencies and over 30,000 services/programs. In 2006, our call center responded to more than 20,041 calls.

The most common reasons clients give for calling First Call / 2-1-1 are financial assistance of many origins, government telephone numbers and various emergency numbers and resources. We have gotten many calls from people who are having problems with methamphetamines and many other drug problems and have referred them to organizations for assistance. In addition to these types of emergencies, we were a part of the Hurricane Katrina efforts 2 years ago where Governor Pawlenty designated 2-1-1 as the contact point for people wanting information on, and volunteering assistance for victims of the hurricane. The 2-1-1 system in Minnesota is working extremely well as all of our agencies are working together very closely to maintain a continuity and a community rapport as well as the rapport between all of us.

First Call / 2-1-1 has worked closely with the other Minnesota 2-1-1 call centers and various community partners, including, United Way of 1000 Lakes, United Way of the Bemidji Area, United Way of Northeastern Minnesota, Advocates for Family Peace, Itasca Alliance Against Sexual Assault, Crisis Response Team and many more. These and many other community partners have devoted significant time and resources to implementing and operating the Minnesota 2-1-1 service to ease access for people in need of information about health and human services. We respectfully request that the Commission find the public is well-served by the use of 2-1-1, that the Commission continue to support the 2-1-1 Dialing Code for this purpose, and that the Commission use its' authority to facilitate more widespread use of the service.

Sincerely,

Jean M. Esler
Executive Director
First Call for Help of Itasca County, DBA First Call/2-1-1